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ABSTRACT

Ten fundamental concepts of a multi-Cultural nature are outlined to help classroom teachers acquaint children with the knowledge that they affect both character and the destiny of the ethnic group to which they belong and, moreover, of society at large. It is important that children understand at an early age the concepts that people are in many ways different, the same, and individually unique; that ethnic groups offer both cultural diversity and conformity; and that each group has an evolving identity. The concept of empathy towards others is conveyed on an individual and group basis. Intergroup relations is another important concept, inasmuch as the building of positive relations among individuals and groups is a constant challenge. The concept of racism is introduced in the hope that children will understand the legacy and manifestations of racism helping them to deal with racial problems. Knowing yourself, the last concept, is a principle that is applicable to an individual and to groups and is a life time goal. (SJM)

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SOME CONCEPTS OF A MULTI-CULTURE CURRICULUM

by

Frances Sussna

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SOME CONCEPTS OF A MULTI-CULTURE CURRICULUM

by Frances Sussna

People are Different

1. The United States is a "nation of immigrants."
2. We have all benefited from the rich diversity of our population.
3. "Different" does not in itself imply "better" or "worse."

People are the Same

1. There is an overriding "humanity" which unites all mankind regardless of differences.
2. People of all groups have the same basic physical needs (e.g. food, shelter) and the same basic emotional and spiritual needs (e.g. freedom, security, dignity, achievement).

People are Individuals

1. The concepts of "collective guilt" and "collective punishment" have wrought much harm throughout history and still pose dangers.
2. Every individual should be judged on his individual merits, rather than be prejudged as a member of "natural" groups (i.e. various groups and associations he was born into.)
3. It is important to be able to judge which are situations in which a person's ethnic background is legitimately a fact to be considered, e.g. hiring waiters for restaurants with French or Japanese decor.

Ethnic Groups are Different

1. Each culture is unique, special and important just as each individual is unique, special and important.
2. The world is made up of thousands of cultures, each with its own special beauty.
3. It is exciting to become acquainted with many cultures.

Ethnic Groups are the Same

1. Within the history of every group we can find some examples which conform to our present standards of ethics and some which do not, e.g. where men of one group have benefited or oppressed other men.

2. Every ethnic group has benefited from contributions of persons who are not members of that group.

3. People of each group have overcome great obstacles.

4. There are valuable learnings to be gained from each group.

5. Some degree of ethnocentrism continues to be found in all groups.

6. Ethnocentrism has both positive and negative aspects.

The Future

1. Each group has an evolving identity.

2. Every individual in that group has some influence on the evolving group identity.

3. Group histories, like personal histories, can always be built upon for better tomorrows.

Empathy

1. The feelings and sensitivities of others are to be respected even if not always understood.

2. A just person takes as much care to avoid wounding another's feelings as to avoid wounding another's body.

3. The ability to imagine yourself "in someone else's place" is an important skill, to be developed through role playing and other techniques.

4. It is sometimes good manners to comment favorably to a person on achievements of any group of which he is a member, although we would not blame him for what we may consider that group's "failings."

5. Facts that may not be complimentary to a particular group need not be ignored.

   a. However, they should be viewed in the context of all related facts rather than in isolation.

   b. They should not be used in such a way as to hurt the feelings of anyone, or to deny him his rights.

6. A group's freedom to act for its own benefit, like an individual's freedom, ends at the point where somebody else's nose begins.

7. Hurting others in order to advance is neither necessary nor desirable.

8. On the contrary, development of compassion and concern for others enhances personal growth.

Intergroup Relations

1. Building positive relations among individuals and groups--whether similar or different--is a constant challenge.

   a. Intergroup--and other human relations--have posed challenges in every country and at every time.

2. Society is still groping for adequate ways of meeting these challenges. Each individual has the opportunity to make a contribution in this area.

3. Critical and creative thinking can and has solved problems that seemed insoluble.

4. Awareness of economic, social, political, and other factors (both historical and current) is necessary in order to understand intergroup hostilities and violence.

5. The rapidly growing body of knowledge of the behavioral sciences also provides insights useful for human relations problems.

6. Knowledgeable communication among groups is very important, and increasingly so.

7. Intellectual and social relationships across group lines are healthy and desirable.

8. Those who attempt to isolate themselves from members of other groups will find this increasingly difficult in contemporary society.

    a. Those who succeed will be depriving themselves of certain kinds of personal growth.

Racism

1. Not only people we may think of as being malicious, but also our own friends, families, and teachers--and we ourselves--have a legacy of prejudice (and often hostilities within ourselves) to overcome.

2. It is important to understand this legacy and to recognize its manifestations, the better to deal with them.

3. Every individual encounters people who have such hostilities and may be a victim of them in one way or another.

4. This can and does go in any direction. The sensitive white person, for example, may be hurt by the non-white who says that "all whites are basically lacking in compassion."

5. Racism is just as wrong, though perhaps more understandable, when it comes from persons who have been its victims.

6. We must learn how to deal with these incidents on an individual basis, to protect ourselves from pain and/or harm, and if possible, to enlighten the hostile person.

7. Society must learn how to deal with them on a community basis.

8. Respectful behavior toward our teachers is necessary and desirable. This does not mean that we should believe or adopt the attitudes of teachers--or anyone else--who may refuse to recognize us or others as important and worthwhile individuals.

Knowing Yourself

1. Self-respect and self-love are not "selfish" in a negative sense, but normal and healthy. We should be able to maintain this respect and love, while squarely facing and trying to correct shortcomings.

2. Increasing self-knowledge and self-understanding should be life-long goals.

3. Respect for the groups we belong to is also desirable and will help toward another important goal: understanding and respect for other groups and the relation of their members to them.

4. The history and culture of our ethnic forefathers have contributed to making us the kinds of people we are.

5. Language learning contributes to the understanding of a culture.

6. There is beauty in tradition.

7. Important ideas can be derived from the holidays, rituals, and proverbs of each group.

8. The myths and legends of each group have a value in that they are enjoyable for study and give insights into the group, whether or not we choose to "follow" or believe them.

9. The individual who has knowledge of and familiarity with many aspects of his group is in a position to choose wisely those group traditions appropriate to his own life.

10. It is possible to be a valuable member of the general society while being a knowledgeable and active member of one's own group.

11. Older people in many families (in some cases including our own parents) may lack the advantages of education we have. This is not uncommon, and does not reflect upon other qualities they may have.

    a. A value common to all groups is respectful behavior toward our elders.

12. Each individual is special and important and may have ideas and talents to contribute. This includes children, even though it is possible that some adults may fail to recognize this.

13. The individual can choose to adapt to the practices of his own life those cultural traditions and expressions of his group he considers most appropriate for himself and can also adopt cultural expressions of other groups that may suit his personality and values.

Many of the foregoing concepts can and should be used by the teacher to inspire every child with the knowledge that he affects both the character and destiny of each group to which he belongs and of society at large; that he cannot choose whether or not to affect them but only how he affects them; and that this is true to some extent even while he is a child.

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In general, teachers should seek to:

1. take account of current developments in educational research and adapt this information to school practices;

2. stimulate a genuine interest in an enjoyment of learning, minimizing artifical rewards and punishments;

3. sharpen ability to think creatively and objectively;

4. provide for individual differences and encourage individual expression and development; and

5. further all aspects of the child's development as both a happy and socially responsible person;

and to impart to the children:

1. enjoyable experiences with the group identification; a "good feeling" about being part of that group;

2. a realistic grasp of the group's common past and present, and its potential for contributing to society as a whole;

3. development of useful and creative tools for further "self-definition" and exploration of their past.